

Exploring the Associations of Culture with Careers and the Mediating Role of HR Practices: a Conceptual Model

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Purpose – The conceptual framework developed in the present study highlights the importance of HR practices as a mediator between national culture and employees' careers.

Design/methodology/approach – Literature study and the development of a conceptual model

Findings – The article contributes to the literature by focusing on how culture via HR practices might influence career success. Drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, five propositions are developed regarding the impact of culture on career-relevant HR practices, and how these practices are likely to influence employee career success.

Research limitations/implications – Culture's effect should not be overstated. Looking at our propositions, it is possible that the influence of HR practices on career success is more pronounced than the direct effects of culture on career success. Future work is needed to measure and compare the relative strength of different associations as well as the possibility that other HR dimensions relevant to the study of career success may exist

Originality/value – At a general level, there is ample evidence of the impact of culture on the effectiveness of a variety of individual outcomes. We focused on the mediating role of HR practices as opposed to advancing hypotheses about direct relationships between culture and career success.

Keywords Career Success, Culture, HR practices

Paper type - Conceptual paper

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the associations between national culture and careers – see Thomas and Inkson (2007) for a review – and there is a broad consensus that careers are shaped by the cultural factors embedded in different national contexts (Ituma & Simpson, 2007). However, most studies focus more on individual-level variables and outcomes, and less on the consequences of globalization and international collaboration for career-relevant Human Resource practices (HR) within organizations. Organizations operating internationally need to adapt their HR practices to the national cultures in which they operate, and those organizations that adopt HR practices which are consonant with national cultural expectations will have better performing units than those whose HR practices do not fit the national culture (Newman & Nollen, 1996).

In the present article, we develop a set of propositions which highlight the role of national cultures in shaping the development of HR practices and the likely impact of these culturally-influenced practices on the careers of employees (i.e., career success). The framework highlights the importance of HR practices as a mediator between national culture and employees' careers. Previous research on cultural adaptation has focused on the challenges and outcomes associated with long-term adaptation to a foreign culture. We draw upon the seminal work of Hofstede on cultural dimensions to develop propositions which link national culture, HR practices and careers by using a fit perspective.

Nowadays, cross-cultural studies become increasingly important (Inkson, Khapova, & Parker, 2007; Tams & Arthur, 2007) and the background of the present study can be understood in the light of the convergence–divergence–crossvergence debate (Ralston, 2008): How much do the direct and indirect associations of culture and career success vary in an increasingly globalizing environment?

LINKING CULTURE AND CAREER SUCCESS AND THE MEDIATION ROLE OF HR PRACTICES.

The impact of national culture on a variety of HR practices has become one of the most important topics in management research (Chen, Chiu, Roese, Tam, & Lau, 2006; Gahan & Abeysekera, 2009). In the present study, we will focus on associations between culture, HR practices, and career success.

From the perspective of institutional theory (Scott, Mannion, Davies, & Marshall, 2003; Westney, 2005) it is suggested that HR practices are affected by differences in national culture and that HR practices will be largely dependent on managers' abilities to understand and balance different cultural values and practices (Wang, Jaw, & Huang, 2008).

The contingency or external fit perspective emphasizes the fit between national culture and HR practices, implying that specific HR policies are affected by national culture. In the present study, we will focus on this external fit between culture and HR (Huselid, 1995). Aycan et al. (2000) examined the associations between the cultural environment and internal work culture and HR from an organizational fit perspective. They tested their model with 1,954 employees from business organizations in 10 countries. The results revealed specific patterns associating culture with techniques such as job enrichment, empowering supervision, and performance management. For instance, managers who perceived high power distance in their national culture assumed employee reactivity, and did not provide job enrichment and empowerment.

Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989, p. 9) defined career as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time”, and this has become an established definition of career today (e.g., Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008; Khapova & Korotov, 2007). Yet between cultures there may be significant differences in the definition and interpretation of career and related constructs. For instance, the notion of “career success” has been addressed frequently in the career literature, but may have a different connotation in western cultures than in say Asian or African cultures. Indeed, even within western cultures there may be considerable variation in how career success is viewed – see Hennequin (2007) for a discussion of different definitions of career success. Gattiker and Larwood (1988) define career success at the general level as job success, whilst Eby, Butts and Lockwood (2003) define it in terms of psychological outcomes. Seibert, Kraimer and Liden (2001) add career satisfaction as an element of career success. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) conclude that what constitutes “career success” is a question that can only be answered by the individual.

HRM practices reflect cultural dimensions in which they were developed and facilitate the creation of specific career success. HR practices that are likely to be sensitive to cultural influences are (see Gong, Law, Chang, & Xin, 2009): (1) employment security, (2) reduction of status distinctions, (3) selective hiring, (4) training and development, (5) performance appraisal, and (6) career planning and advancement. Employment security and reduction of status distinctions can be characterized as maintenance-oriented HRM because they protect employees’ well-being. Employment security may induce employees to stay in their job. Selective hiring and training and development are aimed at developing an organizations talent pool. Performance appraisal and career planning and advancement motivate employees to produce (Gong et al., 2009).

Individuals’ career development patterns¹ and consequent career success are likely to reflect the impact of national culture on HR practices. This can be examined from two key perspectives, subjective and objective, as culture is likely to affect both the subjective and objective shaping of a career. Subjective factors refer to aspects that have a certain motivating potential for employees and which employees find important for their careers in organizations. Objective factors refer to organizational preferences related to specific cultural dimensions, and their association with the careers of individuals. For example, in some cultures employees and employers strive for longer tenure, while in other cultures employees will have more career transitions or job changes. The distinction between subjective and objective perspectives can be usefully examined using the distinction proposed by Gunz for managerial careers between individual career logics and organizational career logics. An individual career logic is ‘the observer’s attempt to infer the manager’s motivations in choosing their [career] route’ (Gunz, 1989, p. 9), and organizational career logic is the ‘reasons an observer infers for particular firms showing particular patterns in the careers of their managers’ (Gunz, 1989, p. 539). Applying this

¹ It is important to note that there is a difference between individual career management and organizational career management. In the present study, we focus on individual career success as the dependent variable. Since we have chosen HR practices as the mediating construct, it seems logical that organization career management is included in this mediator.

to cultural comparisons, we can see that our analysis needs to understand both the cultural values which lead individuals to follow certain preferences, and the cultural values which lead organizations to apply certain HR practices. The two are closely linked, but in the present paper we focus on HR practices.

Generally, career success consists of extrinsic and intrinsic outcomes (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995, Van Emmerik, Euwema, Geschiere, & Schouten, 2006). An example of an extrinsic career success is pay, whereas intrinsic career success is better captured by career satisfaction. The antecedents that lead to extrinsic career success are often quite different from those that lead to intrinsic defined success (Judge et al., 1995). In the present study, we will focus on the specific associations of HR practices with both extrinsic and intrinsic elements of career success. It is important to acknowledge that an individual's career is not solely influenced by the culture in which people are embedded. Other factors may also be important, for instance careers are also influenced by employees' background characteristics such as age, gender, weekly working hours, and organizational tenure (Bernhard-Oettel, Sverke, & Witte, 2005; Malach-Pines & Kaspi-Baruch, 2008), or college and work experience (Wolniak & Pascarella, 2005). Further, careers may also be affected by the macro environment, for example by economic or legal factors.

In the remainder of this article, we will develop our conceptual model and elaborate on the associations between culture, HR practices, and career success.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Defining the outcome variables

Although intrinsic and extrinsic career success will be positively correlated, these constructs are empirically distinct and subjective career success may not be solely predicted by tangible indicators of career success such as higher pay or more promotions (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005).

One of the challenges for taking forward research in this area will be the operationalization of the two key dependent variables, extrinsic and intrinsic career success. Each can be operationalized in various ways, but a parsimonious solution would be to follow the approach adopted by the authors of a substantial meta-analysis of research on career success. Ng et al. (2005) adopted pay and number of promotions as measures of objective career success, and career satisfaction as a measure of subjective career success. For our purposes objective and subjective career success map directly onto extrinsic and intrinsic career success respectively and we will therefore use the suggested measures in outlining designs for possible future research.

Peng, Ames and Knowles (2000) stressed that there is no single definition of culture, researchers instead highlight various aspects of culture, adopting workable assumptions about what culture is. These various aspects are most commonly translated into different cultural dimensions, with the dominant tradition being to categorize cultural dimension according to value systems. The most well-known example of this approach can be found in the seminal work of Hofstede (1983), and we have chosen to adopt his model —notwithstanding that there are other theoretical frameworks that could have been used— because it has been so widely utilized as a basis for cross-cultural research on a range of management issues. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to acknowledge a number of alternative models. For instance, the GLOBE project

defines culture as shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and the interpretation or meaning of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). GLOBE follows Schein's (1990) view of culture as the product of a collective's attempts to address two sets of group issues: internal integration and external adaptation. This is consistent with Trompenaars's (1998) conceptualization of culture as a way in which a group of people solve problems. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) developed a model of culture with seven dimensions, using a broadly similar approach to Hofstede, but with a larger, less homogenous, and less standardized dataset. Another approach is offered by the Schwartz Value Inventory (SVI, Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) developed as a result of a wide survey of over 60,000 people to identify common values that acted as guiding principles for one's life. Schwartz is critical of Hofstede's dimensions, because they discriminate among national cultures and not persons, and most of the items refer to work values, which Schwartz (2008) argues do not measure the range of human values relevant in many life domains. However, as we are focusing specifically on HR practices in this article, the latter points are less of a concern in the present paper.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT: CULTURE, HR PRACTICES, AND CAREER SUCCESS

We develop our hypotheses following Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions. Hofstede (1983) defines national culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one nation from another. National culture-level values can affect personal values, attitudes, and behaviors. He explains that half of the variance in countries' mean scores in his research can be explained by five basic dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, femininity versus masculinity, and long-term orientation, and we will elaborate on these dimensions in the next section.

The underlying theoretical mechanism linking culture and career success through HR practices is based on norms transmission and beliefs about how people should be managed or as we could call it 'Norms Regarding HR Practices'. Culture is thought to have a strong effect on processes within organizations that contribute to choices among different HRM practices (Aumann & Ostroff, 2006). That is, organizations usually have strong norms about how employees should be managed that will be shaped by cultural influences – and essentially culture is the process of transmitting these values and norms. The content of cultural norms transmission can be thought of as the mean level of a particular cultural value, while culture strength can be viewed as the degree of variability or dispersion around this mean score (Aumann & Ostroff, 2006). Thus, whereas Figure 1 shows the overall model of how culture's impact on HR practices will have an impact on career, our propositions also identify relationships between each cultural dimensions and specific HR approaches. Table 1 therefore identifies how these cultures might leads to specific norms regarding HRM which in turn influence practices.

Insert Table 1 about here

To illustrate this, within a culture that emphasizes collectivism this cultural dimension will influence the range of the more specific organizational norms, such that these norms are consistent with the cultural dimension of collectivism. In a strong collectivist culture, for example, one organization may emphasize the rewarding of individual performance, while another may emphasize rewarding of team performance. In both cases, these more specific organizational HR practices of reward management can be consistent with the higher-order culturally based collectivism. As argued by Aumann and Ostroff (2006, p.29) “organizations embedded in the same societal cultural context are likely to develop organizational cultures that share certain cultural attributes derived from that culture”. Consequently, organizations in similar cultural contexts are likely to develop similar HRM practices.

In addition to the broad pattern of cultural norms, there will be considerable variations among individuals within a given culture, and we might speculate that intrinsic career success will be influenced by such variations. To take masculinity-femininity as an example, women in highly masculine cultures are likely to encounter greater discrimination (due to the lower emphasis on gender inequality) and thus to achieve lower levels extrinsic career success. These women are likely to enter the labor market with lower expectations of career success, and so their level of intrinsic career success (operationalized through career satisfaction) may not be much lower than that of women in more feminine cultures. Following Heslin (2005), we can see that in terms of both self-referent and other-referent criteria for career success, women in highly masculine cultures are likely to gauge success differently to women in highly feminine cultures. This example might equally apply to some of the other dimensions e.g. high performing individuals in individualistic cultures are likely to be dismayed by limited career progression, whereas their counterparts in collectivist cultures may be more accepting of promotion on (for example) seniority rather than performance.

Power Distance

Power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2001). High power distance cultures tend to view inequality as normal or natural. In such cultures, lower-status people are addressed by their first names, whereas for higher-status people different prefixes are added before their first names (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006). In low power distance cultures lower-status people are more likely to believe that they should have voice in decision processes (Alves et al., 2006), and will be less motivated if this is withheld.

Power distance has significant implication for management styles and practices (Van Emmerik, Euwema, & Wendt, 2008). In low power distance cultures there is a preference for leadership styles that promote flexibility, innovation, job mobility, and general skills, rather than the specialized skills that are preferred in high power distance cultures (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). People in high power distance cultures accept more guidance from superiors, and this extra attention makes high-status employees more enthusiastic about work. In lower power distance cultures wage differentials between men and women are smaller (Hofstede, 2001). A combination of large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance may mean that senior people (supervisors, older colleagues, parents) take a more active role in young adults' early career.

Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1998) found that proactive career behavior (i.e. initiatives and interventions to shape future careers) was less common in high power distance cultures.

Where hierarchical status takes priority, decisions for promotions may be made by high-level executives (Khapova & Korotov, 2007). In high power distance cultures employees often look to their superiors for guidance, whom they assume know what is best for their career development (Aycaan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003). This was illustrated by the study of Eylon and Au (1999). In their study, they compared 135 MBAs from high and low power distance countries. Especially MBAs from low power distance cultures scored higher on trust and control in oneself as well as in one's organization (i.e., empowerment), which consequently leads to better outcomes for them. Where this type of empowerment is emphasized in HR practices, "free agency" is more common and employees can more easily move his or her career agenda and mobility (see Baruch & Hall, 2004). Thus, for instance, within low power distance cultures, we expect that HR practices are more aimed at promoting empowerment and as a consequence employees will more easily be able to achieve extrinsic career success. Specific HR practices that can act as a mediating mechanism between power distance and career success are HR practices aimed at reducing status distinctions. Consequently, we expect that such HR practices will have a positive impact on career success. An example of intrinsic career success would be feelings of empowerment and an example of extrinsic career success would be actual career achievement by career mobility.

Proposition 1. (a) Low power distance cultures will tend to emphasize HR practices that increase empowerment more than in high power distance cultures and (b) as a consequence employees will score higher on intrinsic career success (e.g., empowerment) and on extrinsic career success (e.g., career mobility).

Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede (2001) defines uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which a culture's members feel uncomfortable in unstructured situations. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and this is also reflected at a philosophical and religious level. People in uncertainty avoiding cultures are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. People in uncertainty accepting cultures may be more tolerant of different opinions and relatively unstructured situations. In the work environment, uncertainty avoidance may lead individuals to try to avoid ambiguous situations and look for precise alternatives. Within such a cultural context there will be many established formal rules or informal norms controlling the rights and duties of employees (Chang, Chi, & Miao, 2007). Thus, people from high uncertainty cultures will be more likely to be motivated by leadership styles that promote planning, career stability, formal rules, and the development of expertise (Dickson et al., 2003). Using a sample of 78 Greek managers, Joiner (2001) showed that within a strong uncertainty avoidance culture, working in hierarchical and rule oriented companies lowered employees' levels of stress.

Considering the importance of rules and regulations in highly uncertain societies, employees prefer strict employment law (Mentzer, 2007), and expect a clearly specified employment contract that addresses all details of the job (Leat & El-Kot, 2007). Employees in such countries also prefer to be told exactly what to do, instead of having a degree of independence and autonomy (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006), and would not appreciate performance-oriented reward systems (Chiang, 2005). In short, employees from countries that try to avoid uncertainty are motivated by certainty and security (Chiang, 2005). Because of that, they will be more attracted to secure, well-specified jobs, such as have traditionally been associated with governmental employment (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007). Employees in

high uncertainty avoidance societies tend to remain longer with the same employer, and appreciate tenured employment contracts (Raghuram, London, & Larsen, 2001) which may have, for instance, repercussions on employees' commitment. Specific HR practices that can act as a mediating mechanism between uncertainty avoidance and career success are HR practices aimed at maintaining or enhancing job security. We expect that such HR practices will have a positive impact on career success for instance job security enhancing measures may promote commitment (intrinsic career outcome) or permanent employment/prolonged tenure (extrinsic career success).

Proposition 2. (a) High uncertainty avoidance cultures will tend to emphasize HR practices that promote stability and security more than HR practices in low uncertainty avoidance cultures and (b) as a consequence employees will score higher on intrinsic career success and on extrinsic career success.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Hofstede (2001) defines individualism against its opposite, collectivism, as the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. In individualistic societies everyone is expected to look after themselves and their immediate family. In collectivistic societies people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families. The dimension of individualism and collectivism has received the most attention in cross-cultural organizational research (Triandis, 1994). It has been shown to have major implication for the motivational as well as employment practices. For example, in more individualistic societies HR practices tend to differentiate between employees based on their individual performance. These societies also use differentiation in the reward system (Beer & Katz, 2003). At the same time, employees from collectivistic countries prefer reward systems that are non-competitive in nature (Chiang & Birtch, 2005).

Employees from individualistic societies more often undertake a job change to improve their position (Albrecht, 2001). They are more attuned toward a promotion (Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006), and prefer to do things alone (Jaw, Ling, Wang, & Chang, 2007). At the same time, research found a positive relationship between collectivism and commitment (Kao & Sek Hong, 1993), and employees in more collectivistic societies are less eager to change employers (Gannon & Newman, 2002). In highly collectivistic cultures, it is expected that organizations would take care of their employees beyond the obligations prescribed under the formal contracts (Ramamoorthy, Kulkarni, Gupta, & Flood, 2007).

Individualism and power distance have been found to be strongly interrelated, both in Hofstede's study as well as in the GLOBE project (see Gouveia, De Albuquerque, Clemente, & Espinosa, 2002) – societies scoring higher on collectivism also score higher on power distance (Smith, 2006). A possible reason for this association is that both individualism/collectivism and power distance are associated with a third factor, for instance economic development or the legal environment.

Regarding individual careers, Di Cesare and Sadri (2003) found that the main difference between individualistic and collectivistic employees lies in their definitions of career satisfaction. Employees from more individualistic cultures tend to be more driven by improving themselves and their own positions in life, and are also characterized by feeling comfortable in competitive environments (Probst, Carnevale, & Triandis, 1999), whereas employees from more collectivistic countries tend to be more motivated by the success of the group as a whole. Specific HR practices that can act as a mediating mechanism between individualism and career success are

HR practices aimed at promoting individual performance (i.e., performance appraisal). Consequently, we expect that such HR practices will have a positive impact on career success. An example of intrinsic career success would be feelings of accomplishment and achievement and an example of extrinsic career success would be actual increased pay.

Proposition 3. (a) More individualistic cultures will tend to emphasize HR practices that stress individual rewards management (e.g., offering individual bonuses and perks, promoting on performance) more than in collectivistic cultures and (b) as a consequence employees will score higher on intrinsic career success (e.g., feelings of accomplishment and achievement) and extrinsic career success (e.g. pay).

Femininity versus Masculinity

Hofstede (2001) refers to masculinity versus its opposite, femininity, as the distribution of roles between the genders. His research showed that (a) women's values differ less among societies than men's values, (b) men's values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women's values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women's values on the other.

Research showed that the distribution of gender roles has major implications for HR practices and for career strategies as well as career opportunities of women. At work, in more feminine societies more weight is attached to subjective, intuition-oriented conditions such as care, nurturing and relationships (Alves et al., 2006). In such cultures, social relations and non-rational processes motivates people to work (Alves et al., 2006). Employees try harder to build a close relationships between each other, colleagues and subordinates, and try to avoid conflicting situations with their subordinates (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006).

At the same time in more masculine societies people ascribe greater value on monetary rewards, while in turn more feminine societies place greater importance on non-financial rewards (Chiang & Birtch, 2005). There is empirical evidence that CEOs get higher levels of pay in masculine cultures (Tosi & Greckhamer, 2004). The possession and the financial value of equity stocks have here also a more important psychological effect (Alves et al., 2006). People also prefer more salary to shorter working hours in the masculine countries (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004).

Hofstede (1983) suggests that career's symbolic meaning and importance is greater in masculine than in feminine countries. Research showed that it is easier for women to navigate their careers in more feminine cultures (Hofstede, 2001). There is also a larger percentage of women in high political positions in highly feminine cultures (Skjelsbæk & Smith, 2001). Since percentages of male and female employees are an outgrowth of this cultural dimension, we will make a distinction between HR practices aimed at male and at female employees in the following proposition. Specific HR practices that can act as a mediating mechanism between femininity and career success are HR practices aimed at selective hiring. We expect that such HR practices will have a positive impact on gender equality within organizations. An example of intrinsic career success would be higher ambition levels of female employees and an example of extrinsic career success would be *more equal male/female salary distribution*.

Proposition 4. (a) More feminine cultures will tend to emphasize HR practices that stress gender equality more than in masculine cultures and (b) as a consequence female employees in more feminine cultures will score higher on intrinsic career success and on extrinsic career success.

Long-Term Orientation

Finally, Hofstede (2001) suggests that culture differ on whether they are long-term or short-term oriented. Long-term orientation refers to the extent to which a culture programs its members to accept delayed gratification of their material, social, and emotional needs.

There is an intuitive link between orientation to the future and careers. Careers can be seen as an exercise in deferred gratification (Stinchcombe, 1983; Wilensky, 1960) and much of the reward for present job performance is assumed to come in the future by career development and moving to more central positions in the organization (Schein, 1971). However, notwithstanding this intuitive link, empirical evidence is scarce. Indirectly, one can find some research connecting these concepts. For instance, life-time employment coupled with promotion by seniority practices, as can be seen in collectivistic cultures (Rhodes, Lowe, Litchfield, & Walsh-Samp, 2008), may reflect high long-term orientation. This high long-term orientation may decrease incentives for employees to take risks by changing jobs or altering their career concepts. The importance of competence and skills development over time is likely to be more important than immediate rewards in long-term orientated cultures (Zhang, Song, Hackett, & Bycio, 2006). Companies in long-term oriented cultures are reluctant to offer rewards frequently whereas it is almost an expectation in short-term oriented cultures, such as in the U.S. Specific HR practices that can act as a mediating mechanism between long-term orientation are HR practices aimed at deferred gratification, Taking a long-term view on the value of skills and career development this would mean career development and planning. We expect that such HR practices will have a positive impact on long-term measures such as competence development (intrinsic career success) and an example of extrinsic career success would be fixed salary schemes whereby employees know what salary growth to expect in the future.

Proposition 5. (a) More long-term oriented cultures will tend to emphasize HR practices that stress career and skill development more than in short-term oriented cultures and (b) as a consequence employees will score higher on intrinsic career success and extrinsic career success.

Directions for Future Research

Adopting a cross-cultural perspective, our model (see Figure 1) derived key cultural dimension determinants that influenced both extrinsic and intrinsic career success through HR practices. We have used Hofstede's model to develop a series of somewhat narrowly focused propositions about the likely indirect impact of culture on careers, as transmitted through the direct impact of culture on management practice. We recognize these propositions are a simplification of the influence of culture on careers, which can be assumed to be multi-faceted, but we take the view that testing specific propositions offers a logical starting point from which to develop theory. However, before setting out potential research designs, we will start by acknowledging some of the limitations of our approach.

One of the criticisms leveled at Hofstede has been the use of nationality as a proxy for culture, with critics noting that many countries are recognizably multi-cultural, and that even within a given culture there are considerable variations. One way around this issue has been to measure individuals' cultural orientations directly. Park et al. (2008) adopted this approach in their research examining the impact of culture on attitudes towards whistle-blowing, measuring culture both in terms of nationality and the individual's self-

reported cultural orientation. Perhaps surprisingly, they found that nationality was a better predictor of differences than cultural orientation, which they suggest may be explained by the way which factors which are non-cultural, but still nationally specific, may influence behavior – see Tayeb (2001) for a more general discussion of this proposition.

Building on our propositions, we hope to encourage future research that examines and tests our model with employees from different countries. In this regard, our proposed framework, which entails mediated relationships and crosses different levels (i.e., culture at the macro level, HR at the meso level, and careers success at the micro level) calls for the use of advanced quantitative approaches to data analysis, such multilevel (structural equation) modeling. Understanding the potential effects of culture directly on HR practices and indirectly on career success is clearly important. Are the predicted HR practices to be found more in those cultures where they would appear to be supported by/consonant with culture? Do they have the direct consequences one might expect? For example, are recognized high performers receiving more pay and faster promotion? Are there any transnational differences in intrinsic career success? These are hugely important issues – our propositions can be read to imply that some cultures will show generally higher levels of career success than others.

However, culture's effect should not be overstated. Looking at our propositions, it is possible that the influence of HR practices on career success is more pronounced than the direct effects of culture on career success. Future work is therefore needed to measure and compare the relative strength of different cultural dimensions as well as the possibility that other HR dimensions relevant to the study of career success may exist. For instance, the implications of culture for career success may also be moderated by the nature of the labor market. For example, countries with a culture of low long term orientation are likely to have labor markets which reward the 'impatience' of such cultures – in other words, labor markets where individuals can and do move frequently to gain career advantage. By contrast, in countries which have a traditional pattern where individuals can only enter at a low level and then ascend through the organization a high long term orientation (a willingness to defer gratification) will be the best driver of effective career management. The interaction of cultural and labor market factors is an important area for further study, and we outline some possible avenues for exploration below.

Culture may have a variable impact on HR practices. Not all organizations within a given culture may adopt HR practices which are wholly consonant with that culture, and this variation means that individuals might select employers on the basis of wanting to work in a particular environment. A great deal of careers research is predicated on the assumption that where possible individuals will seek occupations and organizations which are congruent with personal characteristics (e.g. personality traits and values). An individual whose values are atypical of the culture of which s/he is a member is thus likely to pursue a career in occupations and/or organizations which offer similarly atypical environments. This of course echoes a frequent criticism of Hofstede's work – his original sample was IBM employees, and some scholars have questioned whether individuals choosing to work for an American MNC (at a time when MNCs were much less common) are likely to be typical of their nationality. Thus, although the influence of culture on HR practices proposed above are assumed to be typical, it will be important in any study to ascertain whether these practices are indeed to be found.

This present study has a number of implications for both managers and for decision makers. Notably, the major implications of the study are as follows. First, we proposed a mediation role of HR practices between culture and career success. Evaluating HR practices always has to include cultural influences. Second, implicit in our research model, is that we argue that HR practices have to be aligned with cultural dimensions. Organizations will only be able to carry out effective HR practices if they take specific cultural influences into account.

One of the challenges for research on the impact of culture on careers is that, not only is culture itself highly complex, it is linked to other complex phenomena which are equally likely to have an influence on career – social structures, geography, economic factors etc. Use of comparative studies can allow researchers to control for other factors to some degree, permitting them to focus on the effects of culture. In order to disentangle the effects of culture from those of labor markets, we might adopt a comparative study design in which, for simplicity, we treat labor markets as being either highly regulated or highly deregulated. Though cultural values, such as uncertainty avoidance, may have an influence on which type of market exists, the labor market is also influenced by factors such as the legal context (e.g. European Union employment law ultimately overrules national employment law) (Myors et al., 2008), economic development, ownership, industry composition etc. We might therefore expect to find countries which are culturally similar, but have quite different labor markets and vice versa. Note that cultural similarity does not mean that countries need to be similar on all five dimensions – Hofstede himself saw particular value in clustering countries together which were similar on two dimensions, particular where the dimensions seemed likely to interact. Following this approach, we could identify countries which (according to our propositions) would be expected to show particular career patterns, but which are known to have quite different labor markets. A similar design might be adopted to compare career patterns of employees in companies indigenous to a country with those employed in MNCs.

Another approach which might be illuminating would be to study the impact of management practice on career which is experienced by individuals whose careers take them across a range of environments with different HR practices. This could be most clearly observed in international careers, but movement between any organizations (especially between sectors) may have an impact. Clearly such career paths limit the individuals interaction with organizational career logics (because they are moving firms to progress, rather than accepting the career management of the firm) but HR practices which enhance (or limit) their learning and skills development will still impact their career.

Conclusion

At a general level, there is ample evidence of the impact of culture on the effectiveness of a variety of individual outcomes (e.g., Brodbeck et al., 2000; Dorfman, Hanges, & Brodbeck, 2004; Whitney & Schmitt, 1997). We focused on the mediating role of HR practices as opposed to advancing hypotheses about direct relationships between culture and career success. There is evidence suggesting that the global environment has a converging effect on values and attitudes held by managers and this may translate into increasingly similar HR practices, whereas other evidence suggests that culture has a diverging effect on these values, which may be translated into different HR practices. The

present study, adds to this discussion the career perspective by developing more cultural perspectives to study the direct and indirect association of culture and careers. We have sought to map how cultural expectations of employers (as to how to manage) might act in concert with cultural expectations of employees (as to what it means to be managed and to have a career) in ways which are likely to impact on employees' careers. We have outlined potential avenues for future research, though recognize that these will explore just some of the ways in which culture, HR practices, and careers are linked. However, the propositions set out above provide a basis for developing empirical work which can contribute significantly to our understanding of these issues.

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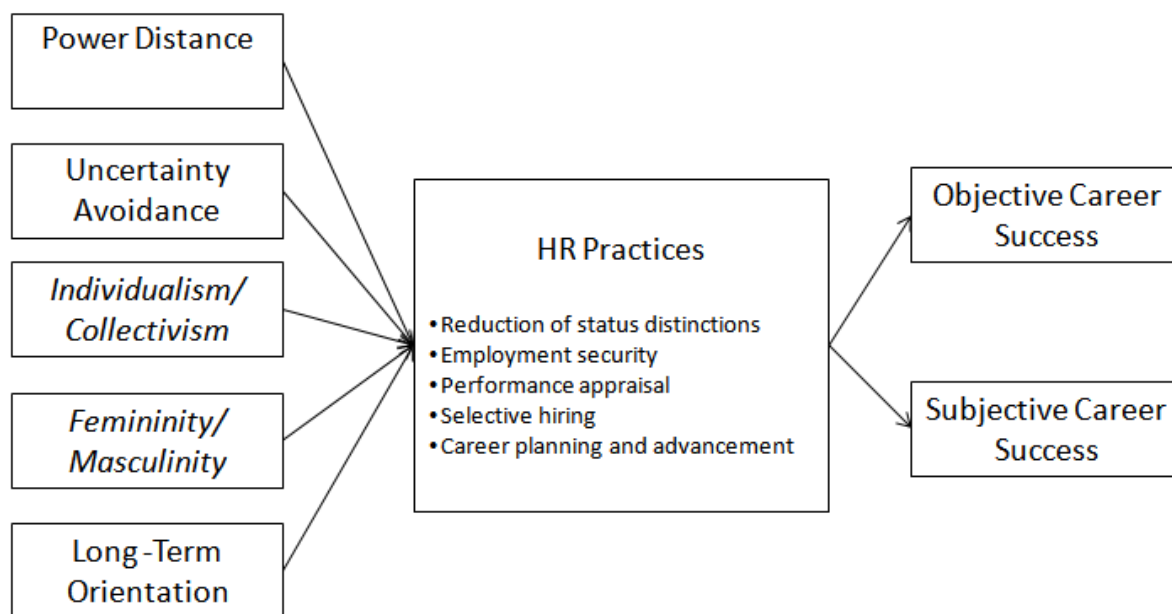


Figure 1: Conceptual Model Depicting the Indirect (Through HR Practices) Associations of Culture and Career Success.

Table 1: Cultural Dimensions and Norms Regarding HR Practices.

Cultural Dimension	Norms Regarding HR Practices	HR Practices (Gong et al., 2009)
Power Distance	Empowerment	- Reduction of status distinctions
Uncertainty Avoidance	Stability and security	- Employment security
Individualism versus Collectivism	Rewarding individual performance	- Performance appraisal
Femininity versus Masculinity	Gender equality	- Selective hiring
Long Term Orientation	Deferred gratification: Taking a long view on the value of skills and career development	- Career planning and advancement.